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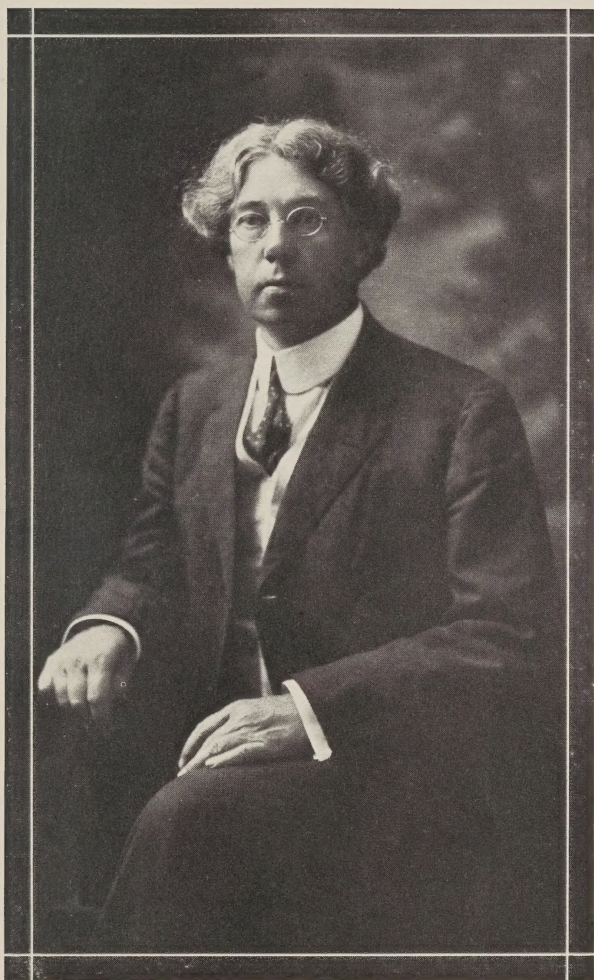
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THE IMMIGRATION AND
EARLY HISTORY
OF THE
PEOPLE OF ZEELAND
OTTAWA COUNTY, MICHIGAN
IN 1847

By ANNA KREMER KEPPEL



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INTRODUCTION

Nov. 20 29 Hughes

In writing this topic in regard to "The Immigration and Early History of the People of Zeeland in Ottawa County, Michigan, in 1847," I found it necessary to study the history of the free church movement in The Netherlands in the early part of the nineteenth century and to trace the religious conditions as far back as the influences of the French Revolution.

For the first four chapters I was obliged to rely largely on secondary material, but I chose only such books as were written from source material. In the fifth chapter I have based my writing almost exclusively on the Journal of Jannes Van de Luijster, the founder of Zeeland. This Journal and other valuable papers were loaned to me by my brother-in-law, the late Mr. Henry De Kruif, of Zeeland, a grandson of Jannes Van de Luijster. To his interest and aid, I feel deeply indebted.

Mr. G. Van Schelven published in "De Grondwet" at one time a series of historical articles on the Dutch settlement in Western Michigan. Some of this was original material, letters, extracts from diaries, and similar writings. All these articles, as well as church records, personal notes of the late Govert Keppel, and many other pamphlets and books were made accessible to me by my late husband, Mr. Herbert G. Keppel, to whose memory I reverently dedicate these papers.

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It was seventy-five years in July, 1922, since the first house was built in Zeeland. To the best of my knowledge no one is now living of the party who made the journey with Jannes Van de Luijster. As we visit the old church, that stands on the half acre donated for that purpose by the founder of Zeeland, we miss the faces familiar in our childhood days. When I close my eyes, I can recall old ladies in quaint black silk bonnets and carefully folded cashmere shawls, who sedately exchanged "ruik-doosjes" and silver peppermint boxes. Yes, a third generation has taken the place of Anthony Van Bree, A. Van Hees, Jan and Jacob Den Herder, of Jan De Pree, and many others who have long since gone to their reward.

It is because we cherish the memory of these heroes, whose faith and courage conquered the wilderness and caused it to blossom as the rose, and to commemorate the work of the two fathers of Zeeland, Dominie C. Van der Meulen, its spiritual leader, and Jannes Van de Luijster, its founder, that we have undertaken this task of writing a history of "The Immigration of the Zeelanders to Michigan."

ANNA KREMER KEPPEL

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CHAPTER I

FRENCH INFLUENCES FROM 1789-1813

Toward the close of the eighteenth century the old, old struggle between the provinces and the States-General was augmented by the friction between the party of reform who called themselves patriots and the partisans of the prince.¹ Actual civil war took place and a Prussian army was necessary in 1787 to restore the stadtholder to his position of preponderance in the republic.² The prince's party also had the support of England, and the disorganized and discomfited patriots fled to France.³

During the next few eventful years of the French Revolution, Dutch statesmen watched with the greatest anxiety the effect of those events upon the future of their country. The declaration of the French Revolutionists "to free all Europe from the yoke of monarchs" meant Belgium first of all. The expatriated patriots meanwhile were busy at Paris urging an attack upon the Dutch republic, counting upon the support among the discontented elements in the country.⁴

In 1793 the national convention declared war against the king of England and the stadtholder of the republic. The invasion of Holland by French troops, the factions within the Republic itself, the final withdrawal of all aid by the allies, resulted in dissolution of the government. On the evening of January 18, 1795, William V. departed with his family to England and the old republic ceased to exist.⁵

The period which now began is still naively referred to as "de Fransche Tijd" (French Age), and it is the influence of this period upon society and the state of religion in the Netherlands which we wish to consider. The patriotic clubs took charge of the several "citizen bodies into communes, of town councils into municipalities, of estates into assemblies of provisional representatives."⁶ The liberty tree was erected in the squares and around it the excited populace danced and sang. Perhaps the hungry French soldier benefited most by the change, as quartered in the home of a citizen, he feasted upon good Dutch cooking.⁷

It is a dark picture that is drawn of conditions in the Batavian Republic about 1800. The naval war, a consequence

(1) Van Schelven, G., "Wat Bracht U Hier?" in *De Grondwet*, Jaargang 48 to Jaargang 49. March 24, 1908, to September 22, 1908.

(2) P. J. Blok, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Volk*; translated by O. A. Bierstadt, *History of the People of the Netherlands* (5 vols., New York, etc. 1898-1912), V, 256.

(3) *Ibid.*, V, 254.

(4) *Ibid.*, V, 275.

(5) Blok, *History of the People of the Netherlands*, V, 290.

(6) *Ibid.*, V, 290, 291.

(7) Van Schelven, "Wat Bracht U Hier?" *De Grondwet*, 1908.

of the French alliance, brought the country to the verge of ruin. The moral decadence is thus stated by Blok: "Neglect of education. . . . society spoiled by etiquette and extravagance; honesty, thrift, good faith regarded as antiquated ideas; art, literature and science languishing, religion and the church suffering from superstition, infidelity, and indifference⁸.

In 1804 Napoleon decided to put an end to the powerless state government which he had treated with contempt, and whose interests he had completely disregarded. From 1804-1806, the statesman, Schimmelpenninck, acted as president by the command of the emperor. In vain he urged the idea of an American constitution, but the emperor declared, "I do not care to see this form of government become contagious in Europe."⁹

In 1806 Prince Louis Bonaparte was given command of the French northern army with headquarters at Nimwegen. Soon the emperor's decision that the commonwealth might choose between annexation and transformation into a monarchy under an imperial prince was brought to the Hague. Schimmelpenninck resigned his office "informing the French ambassador that without the 'sanction of the people,' he did not feel at liberty to transfer the government to the new ruler."¹⁰

On June 22, Louis Napoleon arrived at The Hague, and became the weary nation's first monarch. Unable to satisfy the demands of his inexorable brother, he abdicated in 1810, when by the decree of Rambouillet, Holland was declared reunited to the empire. This period from 1810-1813 marks the nadir of the nation's deepest humiliation. After a visit to Holland, during which he had been everywhere received with almost servile respect and abject veneration, Napoleon wrote, "I have been extremely pleased with Holland; the people have kept the memory of their independence only to feel the advantages of the reunion, and to find in it uniformity of laws, a moderate system of taxation, and a regular progress of affairs. They are more French than any inhabitants of the re-united countries."¹²

Napoleon's view was more roseate than the facts warranted. Conscription, excessive taxation, the cessation of commerce, all caused the discontent to increase. Even the Dutch language seemed to be gradually giving way to French.¹³ It was a population, weary of the yoke that

(8) Blok, *History of the People of the Netherlands*, V, 325.

(9) *Ibid.*, V, 347.

(10) Blok, *History of the People of the Netherlands*, V, 353, 355.

(11) *Ibid.*, V, 373.

(12) *Ibid.*, V, 377.

(13) *Ibid.*, V, 378.

saw the downfall of the Russian campaign and heard the news of the battle of Leipzig.

This was the moment for which the Prince of Orange had been waiting. Taking advantage of a revolution in Holland, he came from England arriving at Scheveningen on the afternoon of November 30, 1813, to begin the work of liberation.¹⁴ The Peace of Paris, May 30, 1814, stipulated that Holland be placed under the sovereignty of the House of Orange and receive an increase in territory. At the desire of England, the Congress of Vienna decided to annex Belgium to the territory of the old republic. The establishment of the kingdom of the Netherlands was consummated August 24, 1815, and William I, the new king, realized the goal of his ambition.¹⁵

(14) Blok, *History of the People of the Netherlands*, V, 385.

(15) *Ibid*, V, 390, 398.

CHAPTER II

REORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH BY WILLIAM I

In the Netherlands the political and the religious are not easily disassociated. In the seventeenth century the free state had developed out of the free church.¹ From the Arminian controversy down to the school question of Premier Kuyper in our own day, questions of politics and questions of religion have been inextricably linked. In the Hollander, theological interest is exceedingly keen, and opinion on the subject is much divided.² Nowhere except, perhaps, in Scotland is conviction so strong on points, which to an American seem either trivial, or baffle us by the very fineness of their distinctions. In order to understand the causes for the secession of 1834, it is necessary to keep in mind this national characteristic.

The church, as organized by the Synod of Dordt 1618-1619, was democratic from its lowest representative body to its highest. It had never been a state church in the sense that it was controlled by the government.³ During the twenty years from 1795-1815, when no less than six separate constitutions were successively in force, the organization of the church had been attacked, though the doctrine and liturgy were untouched. The tendency during this period was to bring the church more closely under the control of the central government.⁴ After the annexation, ministers' salaries were either not paid at all or only partially, so that many a pastor suffered actual want.⁵

The word which we often find describing the spiritual condition of the church of this time is indifference. The submissive attitude of the church during the Napoleonic era was doubtless due to a loss of that positive conviction which had sustained it in the struggle with Spain, and is perhaps accounted for by its permeation with the rationalistic spirit of the eighteenth century.

When William I became king in 1813, he immediately saw to it that the salaries of the ministers be paid in full and provided restitution of amounts in arrears.⁶ When the clergy were properly grateful and in a happy frame of contentment, he proceeded to reorganize the old church, having in mind perhaps the Anglican church as a pattern, with the

(1) W. Van Oosterwijk Bruyn, *Uit De Dagen Van Het Reveil* (Rotterdam, 1900).

(2) James H. Mackay, *Religious Thought in Holland During the Nineteenth Century* (London, etc., 1911), 2.

(3) Henry E. Dosker, "Pilgrim Fathers in the West," in *De Grondwet*, Sept. 26, 1911.

(4) Van Schelven, G., "Wat Bracht U Hier?" *De Grondwet*, 1908.

(5) J. C. Rullmann, *Een Nagel In De Heilige Plaats* (Amsterdam, 1912), 44.

(6) *Ibid.*, V, 45.

sovereign as its practical head. Instead of calling a national synod, as Prince Maurits had done, he entrusted the drawing up of a new constitution to a secretly appointed commission. In this new constitution of 1816, the historic representative bodies though retaining their old names were replaced by appropriate boards under government control.⁷

Out of an article in this constitution in regard to the admission of candidates to the ministry developed the famous "quia" or "quatenus" discussion. In the old formula, the candidate subscribed to the following: "that all the articles and doctrines in the confession and catechism of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands.....in all particulars are in accordance with God's word." The new formula read, "that we accept and heartily believe the doctrine which, in accordance with God's word are contained in the accepted rules of unity of the Dutch Reformed church."⁸ By its ambiguity this article lowered the bars for admission to the ministry and was a source of much discontent to the orthodox party. With the exception of a few voices of protest, as for example that of the classis of Amsterdam in 1816, the church apparently acquiesced in the new order of things.⁹

(7) Dosker, *Pilgrim Fathers of the West*.

(8) Jan Nollen, *Pamphlet De Afscheiding* (Orange City, Iowa, 1896), 10.

(9) *Ibid.*, 25.

CHAPTER III

THE REVEIL AND THE SECESSION OF 1834

In the early decades of the nineteenth century two religious movements arose in Holland, which each in its own way had a great influence on the course of religious thought and political action. The one born of foreign influence is still always spoken of as "Het Reveil," while the other, which led to the free church movement, had as its basic principle the maintenance of the old strict reformed doctrine.¹

The Reveil, or revival, had its origin in Calvin's old stronghold, the city of Geneva.² Its earliest fires were kindled by a young Methodist, Wilcox, of the school of Whitefield, and by a Scotchman, Robert Haldane, whose lectures on the Epistle to the Romans were attended by Merle d'Aubigne, later prominent in the French revival and a friend of Groen van Prinsteren. But it was the life and influence of Cesar Malan that most influenced the revival spirit in Holland.³

The great poet, Bilderdijk, is always spoken of as the father of the Dutch Reveil.⁴ In 1817, as a private teacher in the University of Leyden he taught the history of his country in an entirely new way and drew about himself a little coterie of disciples. Among them were the converted Jew, Isaac Da Costa, himself a famous poet, his friend Capadose, Groen van Prinsteren, jurist, historian and statesman, Willem and Dirk van Hoogendorp, and Jacob van Lennep, the Walter Scott of the Netherlands. In 1823 the ardent Da Costa wrote a pamphlet called "Bezwaren Tegen den Geest der Eeuw" (Grievances against the Spirit of the Age), as a testimony against the formalism and the rationalistic spirit of the church of his day.⁵

Groen van Prinsteren, the founder of the anti-revolutionary party had as one of his political tenets the question of Christian education in the schools, a question which till its final adjustment in the ministry of Premier Kuyper by an alliance of the anti-revolutionary party with the Roman Catholics was one of the most disturbing factors in Dutch politics.

"The great result of the Reveil was a revival of Calvinism that was deeply rooted in the minds of the people."⁶ In this strongly Calvinistic bent, it was truly a nationalistic

(1) Blok, History of the People of the Netherlands, V, 443.

(2) Rullmann, Een Nagel in de Heilige Plaats, 1.

(3) Ibid., 20, 21.

(4) Mackay, Religious Thought in Holland, 25.

(5) Blok, History of the People of the Netherlands, V, 409-410.

(6) Mackay, Religious Thought in Holland, 47.

movement, and in that respect it was akin to the second movement of which we shall now speak, "De Afscheiding" or secession.

In 1829, Hendrick Peter Scholte entered the department of theology in the University of Leyden, and was joined a little later by his friend, Brummelkamp. About these two men a small coterie of kindred spirits grew up among whom were G. F. Gezelle Meerburg, Van Velzen and A. C. Van Raalte. These young pietists were soon contemptuously spoken of as Da-Costianen. They frequented the conventicles of the pious old professor De Fevre, where they read and discussed the writings of the leaders of the Reveil.⁷

Though they had been objects of dislike to their professors and fellow students, they found upon their graduation congregations who gladly welcomed their preaching. In country communities scattered over the whole land, there were simple, pious folk deeply attached to the old doctrine, and bitterly opposed to the innovations of the constitution of the year 1816.⁸ Right here, perhaps, we may mention the question of the use of hymns instead of Psalms in the churches, which indirectly, at least, influenced the free church movement.

Till 1807 only the stately Psalms were sung in the Dutch Reformed churches, but at that time a collection of hymns was adopted, and it was the custom at public worship to sing two hymns and one Psalm. But in many districts, especially in Frisia and Zeeland where Dutch obstinacy is proverbial, the male members would show their disapproval of the use of the hymnal by putting on their hats, or by even leaving the church at the first line of the detested song. Later on, during the secession, a police officer attended services in suspected congregations, and people who showed such disrespect were arrested.⁹

Among these conservative congregations was that of Doveren en Genderen in Noord Brabant of which Scholte became the pastor. In the North, in Groningen, was a similar church, Ulrum, where Hendrick De Cock was preaching with such eloquence that people came from all the neighboring province of Frisia, so that the little church could not accommodate the throngs.¹⁰

De Cock was soon cordially disliked by his colleagues. Some were jealous of his popularity, others resented the fact that he baptized children of their own members, who entertained conscientious scruples as to their own pastor's

(7) Nollen, *De Afscheiding*, 14, 15.

(8) Rullmann, *Een Nagel in de Heilige Plaats*, 95.

(9) Nollen, *De Afscheiding*, 16, 17.

(10) *Ibid.*, 18.

orthodoxy. This was distinctly against church rules. He also wrote some rather violent pamphlets and brochures, in which the spirit of tolerance seems conspicuous by its absence. De Cock was first suspended, then with his session and most of his congregation he signed a resolution of secession from the state church and his dismissal followed, May 29, 1834.¹¹

During the suspension of De Cock, Scholte paid him a visit of sympathy and was invited by the session of Ulrum to preach on a Friday evening, which he did. Having been forbidden the use of the church on Sunday, he spoke in the afternoon in an open field, to a large congregation. Upon his return to Doveren, he, too, was suspended for preaching and baptizing at Ulrum without permission of the constituted authorities. Thereupon on November 1, 1834, he and his congregation with the exception of four men and two women signed the articles of secession. Since this document clearly states the position of the secessionists, I will quote its contents. "We, the undersigned, members of the Reformed Church of Doveren, Genderen, and Gansoyen, having learned that the board of control of the classis of Heusden has suspended our pastor because he preached, baptized and addressed an open air meeting in the congregation of Ulrum; since all these activities are founded on the word of God, the church can see nothing in this act of the board of classical control except the placing of human ordinances above those of God's word; just as was done in the days of the reformation by the papist ecclesiastical hierarchy; in the days of Jesus and the apostles by the Pharisees and the Scribes, and in the days of the Old Testament by the opponents of the true worship. Therefore we hereby declare that we no longer wish to live under such control, nor remain in church fellowship with those who do submit; but holding fast to God's word and the formulas of unity which conform to that in every particular, we separate ourselves from them as a reformed church. In our public worship we shall follow the old church liturgy, and our elders called by God will for the present conform to the constitution of the Synod of Dortrecht held in the years 1618 and 1619."¹² A copy of this was sent to the king together with a statement of their position.

The example of Ulrum and Doveren was soon followed by other churches in various parts of the country and the first

(11) Nollen, *De Afscheiding*, 21.

(12) Translated from *Kompletee Uitgave van de Officieele Stukken Betreffende den Uitgang uit het Nederl. Hervormd Kerkgenootschap van de Leeraren H. P. Scholte, A. Brummelkamp, S. Van Velzen, G. F. G zelle Meerburg en Dr. A. C. Van Raalte* (in two volumes, Kampen, 1863), I, 14, 15.

Synod of seceded churches met in secret in a private home in Amsterdam in 1836. It had at that time no representatives from the province of Zeeland, because there was no organized secession in Zeeland until later in that year.¹³

We have called this chapter "Reveil en Afscheiding," but the leaders of the earlier movement did not wholly approve and certainly did not join the separatists. Da Costa and others took the view that although the Reformed church of the Netherlands had deviated in many particulars from her early doctrine and discipline, that still this did not constitute her "the false church," and that thus there was no warrant for leaving her communion to found a new one. They recognized the injustice of the persecution which their former friends had to suffer, and Groen van Prinsteren even appeared as the champion of the Separatists in the administration, but they did not consider a return to the principles of the Synod of Dort as the only remedy for existing conditions. On the other hand the seceders were deeply grieved by the aloofness of those from whom they expected not only sympathy but cooperation. It was impossible for them to understand how the men of the Reveil could remain in a church which instigated persecution, and by remaining acquiesce in its attitude.¹⁴

(13) Nollen, *De Afscheiding*, 26.

(14) Bruyn, *Het Reveil*, 358-360.

CHAPTER IV

PERSECUTION

It is difficult to imagine that in the Netherlands, to which John Robinson and his Scrooby congregation fled in the seventeenth century, scenes of actual persecution for conscience sake could take place in the nineteenth century. In the constitution of 1815, when Willem I ascended the throne, religious toleration to all was expressly decreed. Then why deny its benefits to these seceders?

Precisely because they were seceders from the State church and assumed themselves to be "the true church," they aroused synodical opposition, and were at first refused recognition as other religious bodies by the government. Father William, as the king was often called, was "indefatigable, sincere and honest, but his great fault was arbitrariness and stubborn adherence to his own opinions, which made him consider all opposition as disobedience or lack of judgment." That conditions in general in the Netherlands were far better than in countries under the surveillance of the Holy Alliance is proved by the fact that Metternich regarded the king as a defender of liberal, monarchical principles and his kingdom as a dangerous example to other nations.¹

Having no church buildings of their own, these people met in open fields, in barns, or in some private home. These conventicles, conducted as they often were by men who had little schooling, and who contradicted the preaching of the regular clergy, aroused the opposition of the church authorities, who, in turn, had the backing of the government.² Church formalism can never understand a revival or pietist movement. No doubt, too, being true individualistic Dutchmen, these separatists were perhaps at times somewhat exasperating in their defiance of constituted authority.

However the stubborn fact remains that there was both official and popular persecution of the movement for a number of years, and it was a long time before they ceased to be despised and contemptuously treated. In 1835, under the presidency of Donker Curtius, the General Synod recommended the enforcement of certain articles in the Code of Napoleon to suppress the meetings of secessionists.³ By this law not more than twenty persons might meet for religious, literary or political reasons without a license and compliance in every particular with certain stipulated con-

(1) Blok, *History of the People of the Netherlands*, V, 404.

(2) *Ibid.*, V, 444.

(3) Nollen, *De Afscheiding*, 33.

ditions. The constitutionality of this law as applied to their religious meetings was tested in the courts and the decisions were diverse, so that in general persecution depended on the attitude of the local authorities. July 5, 1836, a royal decree authorized the organization of local associations for religious worship under very difficult provisions. Compliance did not mean recognition as a denomination. It only saved individual congregations from further official persecution, and those who applied for recognition under this decree found it difficult to obtain even when willing to comply with the conditions. In 1839, the congregation of Utrecht under Ds. H. P. Scholte was the first to receive the official sanction for its existence.⁴

Scholte's action did not meet with unqualified approval among the brethren. Many refused to request authorization for their associations and called themselves "churches under the cross." It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the differences which caused factions among the secessionists from 1836 on. That such would be the case is natural when one considers the tendency among the Dutch to independent thinking and action, the different characteristics of people from the various provinces, and the fact that many of them were uneducated and narrow minded even though sincere.

September 12, 1840, William I yielded to pressure and abdicated in favor of his son, William II. As Blok says, "the old king was too much a man of the eighteenth century to feel at home amid all the new things."⁵ His son, William II, by modification of the conditions of the decree of 1836, brought practical toleration and added many to the number of officially recognized congregations. But as before, others were still convinced that certain conditions were unjust, and remained independent. Van Schelven mentions instances of official persecution as late as July 8, 1846.⁶

This official persecution was of various kinds. Sometimes detachments of soldiers were quartered in the homes of separatists. In Ulrum, in 1834, one hundred and fifty soldiers were thus lodged.⁷ Open air meetings were often dispersed by charges of cavalry. At Almkerk and Emmikhoven the soldiers used their sabres and wounded a number.⁸ Fines were constantly imposed and the few who had means found it a heavy drain upon their resources. Nol-

(4) Van Schelven, "Wat Bracht U Hier?" De Grondwet, 1908.

(5) Blok, History of the People of the Netherlands, 447.

(6) Van Schelven, "Wat Bracht U Hier?" De Grondwet, 1908.

(7) Nollen, De Afscheiding, 35.

(8) Dosker, Henry E., Levensschets van Rev. A. C. Van Raalte (Nykerk, 1893, 45.

len says that Scholte had paid between seven and eight thousand florins in fines and costs.⁹

Jannes Van de Luijster, elder of the seceded church of Borsele, in the province of Zeeland, and later founder of the village of Zeeland in Michigan, has left a very naive account of a typical conventicle held in his barn, June 21, 1840, and its resultant judicial process. The story loses much of its quaint simplicity in the translation.

"June 21, 1840, Dominie C. Van der Meulen, minister at Middelharnis, preached in my barn on Sunday. The weather was fine and about one thousand people were present and all was quiet and edifying. Even so many strange horses were in the pasture together in great peaceableness. The Lord hath given witness of the word of truth to many consciences and especially to His children."

However, Dirk Wisse, burgomaster of Borsele signed a judicial warrant.

"July 20, with my brother, deacon Jan Steketee, appeared before the court at Goes. Fined for the minister, myself and Jan Steketee, each, one hundred florins."¹⁰ Of this amount the book shows that Van de Luijster paid one hundred and sixteen florins.

Once when Ds. Van der Meulen was preaching to one of his congregations in Zeeland from an improvised pulpit in a wagon box on a threshing floor, two soldiers made their way through the large audience to the minister and said, "In the name of the king we forbid you to preach to this audience, and command you to leave this place." The fearless answer they received was, "You have brought your message in the name of the king, but I tell you in the name of the King of kings that I am commissioned to preach the gospel this day to the people here assembled."¹¹

These are just a few examples of official persecution. For years after religious toleration had been granted by the government, popular persecution continued unabated. Boycotting their business, throwing stones, discharging employees who belonged to the despised sect, calling vile names were common methods by which life was made difficult for separatists in their own land. But faith so tested not only endured but waxed strong, and the flourishing free church of Holland today is testimony to that fact.

(9) Nollen, *De Afscheiding*, 35.

(10) A translation made from a private journal kept by Jannes v d Luyster.

(11) Translation from an address "Cornelius van der Meulen" delivered by Jacob Van der Meulen, D. D., and reprinted in *De Grondwet*, (Sept., 1911).

CHAPTER V

THE FREE CHURCH MOVEMENT IN ZEELAND

We have endeavored thus far to trace the general development of the Separatist movement in the Netherlands. Since we are most concerned with the development of the free church in the province of Zeeland and its relation to the subsequent emigration from that district, we will endeavor to trace its history from the somewhat meagre sources of information at our disposal.

The first congregation in Zeeland seems to have been that of Ds. Budding at Biggekerke on the island of Walcheren, who seceded with his congregation April 1, 1836.¹ He was very eccentric, radical, and narrow-minded, forming a great contrast to the genial, sane leader of the emigration, Ds. Van der Meulen. Ds. Budding was imprisoned at Middeburg at least four times in the days of persecution, once for a period of six months. Before 1839 he seems to have visited the newly formed congregations, preaching, making pastoral calls and baptizing the children. He seems to have been out of harmony with the desire of Van de Luijster and Steketee² and others who wished official recognition from the government. He also wished to see the paraphrase of the Psalms, known as the paraphrase of Datheen, which had been discarded in 1773 for the beautiful one still in use today, restored. On these disputed points he lost touch with the more sane and liberal element. He came to America but had no wide-spread influence or leadership. Many amusing stories are still told of his eccentricities and his language more forceful than elegant.

Just when the congregation at Borsele was founded we have not been able to discover, but the journal of Jannes Van de Luijster, who has been mentioned in a previous chapter, begins October 27, 1837, and mentions a classis consisting of Borsele, Nieuwdorp, s'Heerenhoek, and Heinkenszand. These are four quaint little villages in the southeastern corner of the island of Zuid Beveland. June 22, 1838, a classis was held at Goes and five other churches are mentioned as sending delegates. Again in 1840, representatives from the other side of the Scheldt, from Ter Neuzen and Axel are also present. From this time on we find the names of Oggel and De Pree frequently mentioned.

One of the most important figures in the free church movement in the province of Zeeland was undoubtedly the

(1) Verhagen, J., *De Geschiedenis der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland* (Kampen, 1886), 357.

(2) Steketee, a deacon and influential member of church at Borsele. Founder of Steketee dry goods business in Grand Rapids, Mich.

faithful elder, Jannes Van de Luijster, who owned a large and fertile farm near Borsele. The simple, unvarnished account of his activities, as told in his journal, indicate an unselfish, singularly devout nature, of that mystic type which without the saving grace of common sense so easily becomes fanatical. Fortunately Van de Luijster had very good judgment, and though narrow in his own conceptions of truth was more critical of himself than of others. His time, his home, his whole substance seems to have been consecrated to the cause.

In the province of Zeeland one finds a Latin strain in the population, traceable to Huguenot refugees, or perhaps to French and Spanish soldiers. The Zeelander is quicker of perception, more imaginative than his brothers from other provinces. Owing to the insular character of his surroundings, his constant struggle with the sea he is also intensely tenacious of his convictions, provincial in his outlook and individualistic in his attitude.

The gift of understanding the people with whom he was dealing belonged in abundant measure to Ds. Cornelius Van der Meulen, who was known as the "apostle of Zeeland." He was one of the pioneer ministers of the free church. After a year of study with Ds. Scholte at Utrecht he was ordained to preach, and accepted a call to minister to the twelve congregations of Zeeland, making the city of Goes, the capital of Zuid Beveland, his headquarters. He began his work in March, 1841, and emigrated with some of his people in 1847. Of his life and activities a fuller account will be given in later chapters.

The church at Borsele began to request permission to have their congregation recognized as early as 1839 and their requests were renewed from time to time without bringing the desired reply. Mr. Steketee was even sent as a delegate to the king, but returned without having had an audience. Finally in July, 1841, recognition was obtained and permission granted to hold services in Van de Luijster's barn, where they had been so long held in defiance of the authorities. The growing strength of the church in Zeeland is indicated by the acquisition of various church buildings between 1841 and 1847.³

(3) This chapter is based on a study of the Journal of Jannes van de Luijster, loaned by the late Mr. Henry De Kruif of Zeeland, a grandson of Van de Luijster.

CHAPTER VI

THE COLONIZATION MOVEMENT

The motives which led to the colonization projects among the Seceders have been much discussed. Earlier papers laid stress upon the religious motive. At present the tendency is toward an emphasis upon the economic conditions. Undoubtedly there were several factors which determined the emigration, but a careful study of the situation and of the character of the men, who led the movement, would lead one to believe that the desire for freedom to work out their peculiar religious and educational ideas unhampered was at least the primary consideration. Blok writes in speaking of the Separatists, "Several others.....sought some years later in North America under lead of Van Raalte the liberty of worship which they believed could never be obtained here."¹ Professor D'Ooge in a fairly recent article on this subject says, "The impulse, that brought the Dutch pioneers to the State of Michigan in 1847, was essentially the love of religious freedom."²

Whether this movement was a part of the general northern European emigration of that period is not so easy to determine, but the chances are that it was not. Dr. Dosker seems to think that the epidemic of emigration, which infected Europe in this decade, had reached Holland by way of Germany.³ Mr. G. Van Schelven holds the view that it had nothing in common with the exodus from Germany and Ireland, and northern Europe in general.⁴ That it was almost entirely confined to the Separatists is the conclusion to which a comparison of such statistics as are available would lead one. The figures of immigration from the Netherlands for the years from 1846-1849 are as follows: 1846, 979; 1847, 2631; 1848, 918; 1849, 1190 or a total of 5718 for the four years.⁵ Statistics of Michigan assign to Holland and Zeeland a population of 1829 in 1850.⁶ The original band of Scholte's enterprise numbered about 900.⁷

We have no records of the Hollanders, coming in those years to Wisconsin, Grand Rapids or cities of the east, but we know that their number were considerable, and that

(1) Blok, *History of the People of the Netherlands*, V, 445.

(2) D'Ooge, Martin L., "The Dutch Pioneers of Michigan," *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* (Lansing, 1912), 205.

(3) Dosker, Van Raalte, 57.

(4) Mr. Van Schelven, historiographer of the Dutch colony in Holland, stated this view to the writer in a conversation, August, 1916.

(5) Bromwell, William J., *History of Immigration to the United States* (New York, 1856), 132-144.

(6) *Statistics of the State of Michigan compiled from the census of 1850* (Lansing, 51), 122.

(7) Nollen, *De Afscheiding*, 43.

for the most part, they were affiliated with the Seceders. It is surely safe to say, then, that at least seven eighths of the immigration of those years was a result of propaganda on the part of certain Separatist leaders in the Netherlands.

The political conditions, which led to the exodus from Germany to which we owe Carl Schurz and many like him, were practically non-existent in Holland. William II was by character and because of constitutional checks out of line with the policies of the Holy Alliance. On the other hand, the extreme poverty which drove the Irish to seek a home in the United States has always been unknown to the Dutch. Just how bad economic conditions were in the forties is hard to judge, as the material for a comprehensive view is not available. Blok does not especially emphasize industrial conditions in this decade. It was undoubtedly true that the war with Belgium had had a bad effect upon industry and commerce and had necessitated heavy taxation. The potato blight affected Holland considerably, since it was the staple article of diet among the peasants. Quotations from articles written by Scholte, Van Raalte and Brummelkamp about 1845 or 1846 show that the unemployment was great especially among farm laborers, that pauperism was on the increase, prices were high, and that a feeling of anxiety for the future was quite general in view of conditions.⁸

As far as the Separatists were concerned the situation in those years was not especially hopeful. They were not yet accorded recognition as a denomination, and official persecution had not wholly ceased. They were despised and discriminated against as individuals. The school question too, loomed large as a factor in the emigration movement.⁹

Three names stand out prominently as propagandists for colonization, Ds. H. P. Scholte, and Van Raalte and Brummelkamp. The last two were brothers-in-law, and devoted to each other by a bond like that of David and Jonathan. These men wrote and lectured and organized societies for the furtherance of their ideas.

The two regions seriously considered as possible locations were the United States or America, as they called it, and the island of Java. Java appealed to them for several reasons. In the first place by going there they could retain their citizenship, and remain Netherlands. More was known in Holland about Java at that time than about the United States. Van Raalte in particular had a very high idea of the climatic and agricultural advantages of the pearl of the East Indies. The thought of using the colony as a

(8) Van Schelven, "Wat Bracht U Hier?" De Grondwet, 1908.

(9) Ibid.

nucleus for missionary effort among the heathen also was an attractive one. However all attempts to secure a promise of religious freedom or of any financial aid from the government failed, and the die was cast in favor of America.¹⁰ A full discussion of the reasons for this decision was given in a pamphlet which appeared in the spring of 1846, and was signed by Van Raalte and Brummelkamp.¹¹

Certain enterprising individuals who had gone to the United States wrote letters to relatives and friends, which were printed and found a wide circulation among the brethren. Among these writers were A. Hollerdijk, who wrote from Milwaukee in 1845, H. Barendregt from St. Louis, Derk and Louise Arnand from Boston, 1846, and R. Sleister from Waupun, Wisconsin. In giving his impressions of conditions in what was then the territory of Wisconsin, one of these letter writers says, "I have never seen rye bread in America, but pork and meat three times a day. This territory is called Wisconsin, and is about two thousand and sixty-five hours from Rotterdam. All religions are free, but there are many religions. The schools are free, and we need not fear wild animals. Women don't need to do anything but milk and get the meals, so they are well off. There are many pious people in this country, especially among the Methodists. Women dress here just as they do in Arnhem,¹² except for the jackets and caps."¹³

Meetings in the interests of colonization were held in various cities in the Netherlands. In August, 1846, at Utrecht it was found that seventy quite well-to-do families, mostly from the province of Zuid Holland were ready to go as a body and to take with them some of the poorer brethren. That was the nucleus of the company which went with Ds. Scholte.¹⁴

During the summer of 1846, Van Raalte was critically ill with typhoid, and it was on this sickbed that he resolved to go with the people as a leader.¹⁵ Both he and Scholte; though working independently of each other, had decided most emphatically in favor of colonization, not individual emigration. Years later at a General Synod at Hudson, New York, Van Raalte declared that "Americanization by assimilation, not by absorption,"¹⁶ was his idea of what was best for the Hollanders. This idea has shaped all the history of

(10) VanSchelven, "Wat Braacht U Hier?" De Grondwet, 1908.

(11) Brummelkamp en Van Raalte, "Waarom bevorderen wij de Volksverhuizing en wel naar Noord Amerika en niet naar Java?" This is printed in full in Van Schelven's "Wat Bracht U Hier?" De Grondwet, 1908.

(12) Arnhem, a small city in Gelderland near the German border.

(13) Van Schelven, "Wat Bracht U Hier?" De Grondwet, 1908.

(14) Ibid.

(15) Dosker, Van Raalte, 65.

(16) Van der Meulen, "Cornelius van der Meulen," De Grondwet, August 8, 1911.

the Dutch settlements in the west, although opinions as to its wisdom have been diverse.

In casting about for some anchorage in America, Van Raalte and Brummelkamp wrote a letter in the Dutch language addressed "To Those of the Faith in the United States of America." This they entrusted to a young man, Roelof Sleister, who was setting out in the summer of 1846. It fell into the hands of Dr. J. N. Wyckhoff, a pastor of one of the Dutch Reformed churches in Albany.¹⁷ He was one of the few who could still read the Dutch language and he placed a translation of this letter in the *Christian Intelligencer*¹⁸ of October 15, 1846, thus paving the way for Dr. A. Van Raalte's kindly reception by the Dutch Reformed church in the East. Scholte had likewise written to Dr. Thomas De Witt, who, as a delegate of the General Synod, had visited The Netherlands in 1846, and had received a favorable reply.¹⁹

Van Raalte sailed from Rotterdam in Septembbr, 1846, landing in New York in November. Scholte's company, about eight or nine hundred strong sailed in the spring of 1847, arriving at Baltimore. Sholte, himself, had taken passage in the steamship "Sara Sand," which made the journey from Liverpool to Boston in thirteen days. After much investigation, he decided on Iowa as the final destination. Van Raalte had by that time made Michigan his choice.²⁰

These men were the two pathfinders, and later settlers either went to Scholte or Van Raalte. Both were University graduates, accustomed to a refined and comfortable manner of living. To deliberately choose to leave all the old associations, to endure uncomplainingly with their families the hardships of the long tedious journey and the harder years of pioneer struggle, indicates a strength of purpose and devotion that will continue to win our admiration. To act as personal conductors at that time, for several hundred people, unacquainted with the language or conditions, and encumbered with a most miscellaneous assortment of baggage from feather beds to frying pans was a task which even the modern tourist agency might have found Herculean.

(17) Dosker, Van Raalte, 64.

(18) The *Christian Intelligencer*, then as today, the denominational paper of The Dutch Reformed Church.

(19) Van Schelven, "Wat Bracht U Hier?" De Grondwet, 1908.

(20) Nollen, De Afscheiding, 43.

CHAPTER VII

COLONIZATION IN ZEELAND

Three men took the leadership in the matter of emigration from Zeeland. They were Jan Steketee and Jannes Van de Luijster of the village of Borsele and the pastor of the churches in Zeeland, Ds. C. Van der Meulen. The first person in the province to think favorably of the colonization schemes is said to have been Jan Steketee, who felt the pressure of industrial conditions and saw a future for his family in America.¹

Ds. Van der Meulen was not in favor of emigration at first. He even opposed it, and said, "Let us pray the Lord to keep His children from leaving the land of their nativity and seeking foreign shores with motives of worldly aspirations."² Later on, by arguments possibly of Steketee and Van de Luijster, he changed his mind as to the advisability of this plan. As to his motives, he expressed himself very clearly and emphatically as was his wont, and no one who knows his reputation can find it possible to doubt his sincerity. In January, 1849, he wrote to Ds. De Moen in The Netherlands, as follows: "My reason for leaving The Netherlands was not to become great and rich in America, but because I saw that church and state were nearing destruction, and God in His providence opened a way of escape."³

Elder Van de Luijster has left an account of how he came to make his own momentous decision, in which mystic piety played a great part. Here we find the view just stated reiterated, namely, that America offered a way of escape for God's people from the judgments of the Almighty. It is clear that he had been carefully following the course of the movement since its earliest inception, and the decision he finally arrived at was not hastily conceived. He was a quiet man, living much within himself, and wrestling as Jacob of old, in deep soul struggles. The battle was finally won January 1, 1847, and he describes his frame of mind that day in a phrase we find it difficult to express by an English equivalent. He says, "Ik ben van alles losgemaakt." It means he felt free from the restraints of material things, willing to break the tender ties which bound him to his

(1) Van der Meulen, John, "Spirit of the Early Leaders" address printed in *De Grondwet*, (January, 1917).

(2) Broek, Dirk, "De Leiders der Landverhuizing," an address delivered in Zeeland, Michigan, Sept. 19, 1888, and reprinted in *De Grondwet* (July, 1912).

(3) Translated from a letter dated January 20, 1849, and printed in *De Grondwet*, (October, 1914).

native land, to the broad acres and friendl'g homestead, lifelong relationships and friendships.⁴

These men were not dreamers who could not translate their vision into action. In the first months of the year, 1847, three meetings were held at Goes to plan for colonization. As at Utrecht, an association was formed, but they took the unique step of organizing themselves into a congregation. They chose Jannes Van de Luijster and Johannes Hoogesteger as elders, and Jan Steketee and A. Glerum as deacons. They called as their pastor, Ds. C. Van der Meulen, who accepted the burdens of leadership laid upon him.⁵

Meanwhile Jannes Van de Luijster had sold his farm for sixty thousand florins, about twenty-five thousand dollars. This amount he took with him in gold in a stout wooden chest which was zealously guarded on the long journey.

Out of the congregation at Borsele, seventy-seven persons probably many of them employed on his farm, and whose means of subsistence would be threatened by his departure, were taken along at Van de Luijster's personal expense.⁶ His account book shows expenditures which indicate that clothing and a necessary outfit for the journey was not infrequently included.⁷

Finally four hundred and fifty-seven persons were ready to go.⁸ It is never easy for a Hollander to leave his native land, nor even the village or house where he was born. Permanency is a characteristic of the Hollander. His natural conservatism makes change and adjustment to new conditions difficult. At that time a journey to America was looked upon in the light of taking a death-bed farewell. One can easily imagine the scene at Goes when Dominie Van der Meulen preached his last sermon there. He took as his text that passage⁹ in which St. Paul describes a similar farewell scene, and it is recorded that there was deep emotion and much heart breaking weeping.¹⁰

(4) Journal of Jannes van de Luijster.

(5) Van Schelven, "Wat Bracht U Hier?" De Grondwet, 1908.

(6) Journal of Jannes van de Luijster.

(7) Rekenboek of Jannes van de Luijster.

(8) Journal of Jannes van de Luijster.

(9) Acts 20:25-27.

(10) Translated from a biographical address delivered by Rev. C. van der Meulen at Grand Rapids, Mich., and reprinted in De Grondwet (May, 1912).

CHAPTER VIII

THE LONG JOURNEY

If we allow our minds to travel back to the year 1847, we shall remember that although there were steamships which made the journey from Liverpool to New York in thirteen days, the sailing vessel was still very commonly used for both freight and passengers. In this tedious and primitive fashion, the Zeelanders made the voyage to New York.

They had divided into three groups, each of which chose a leader. There were one hundred and fifty-seven persons in the company in which Ds. Van der Meulen and his family found themselves.¹ They sailed from Rotterdam, with Johannes Kaboord as leader.² They seem to have suffered a great deal from illness and buried twenty-six of their number at sea.³

The remainder, under the leadership of Jannes Van de Luijster and Jan Steketee, respectively, were to sail from Antwerp. Small boats carried them up the Scheldt to that city. The ship, to which Jannes Van de Luijster and his company had been assigned, proved to be unseaworthy, and they had to wait almost two weeks before the company furnished a better vessel. Meanwhile the company allowed one and one half francs per person daily for maintenance and lodging. This was entirely insufficient, and the tedious delay made serious inroads on the supplies and money for the journey.⁴

Finally the "Kroonprins von Hanover" weighed anchor, and the first stage of the voyage down the Scheldt was begun. They have left no record of the emotions, which must have filled their hearts, as in the early morning they looked for the last time on the fertile fields lying far below the massive dykes, and caught a last glimpse of the homestead of Van de Luijster and the red-tiled roofs of Borsele. But that their hearts were heavy we have no doubt, and especially when we read, that before they left Flushing behind, two children had died. Four other persons were buried at sea in the course of the voyage.⁵

Accommodations on sailing vessels were most primitive. The passengers had to furnish their own provisions, altho the amount was regulated by the government to guard

(1) Van de Luijster's Journal.

(2) Van Anrooy, Peter, "Zee en Landreis van de Zeeuwen," in *De Grondwet*, September, 1910.

(3) De Bey en Zwemer, *Stemmen uit de Hollandsche Gereformeerde Kerk in Amerika*. (A pamphlet of which the author cannot find time and place of publication).

(4) Van Anrooy, "Zee en Landreis."

(5) *Ibid*.

against danger of starvation. A stove and two copper kettles were furnished by the ship company, but the passengers had brought with them all sorts of utensils. They appointed two cooks, and all ate their meals together like one large family. The wooden chests, which contained their belongings also served as seats. The Van de Luijster family brought at least one splint bottomed chair for mother Van de Luijster, and this is carefully cherished to this day in the home of one of her descendants. On Sundays they sang Psalms and listened to preaching by Jan Van de Luijster and Cornelis Van Malsem, two young men, who had been studying for the ministry.⁶

It had been decided that the leader who arrived first should decide the locality of the final settlement, and leave word for the others to follow. Although the "Kroonprins of Hanover" was the last to sail, her voyage was the most propitious, and the responsibility for making a choice, therefore, rested upon Jannes Van de Luijster. They arrived at New York on Sunday, June 6, 1847, and Ds. Scholte was there to meet them to persuade them that Iowa was the most desirable place for them to locate.⁷

Scholte and Van Raalte differed widely on the question as to what constituted a suitable location for Hollanders. It is my purpose to take up in more detail in a later chapter the reasons for Van Raalte's choice of Michigan. It is only necessary to explain here that Scholte's followers were better provided with money. A prairie country really demands more capital for building materials, fuel and means of subsistence while waiting for the first crops. In a forest country the lumber serves many uses, and the trees can also be converted into ready cash by selling shingles, lathes, staves, etc. On the other hand, Scholte argued that Hollanders were totally unacquainted with the forested area, and that the rich loam of the Iowa lands was the kind of soil with which they were most familiar.⁸

From New York to Albany, the journey proceeded by steam boat. A committee there met Dr. Wyckhoff and conferred with him in regard to Michigan, but no definite decision seems to have been reached. A child died and was buried at Albany. From Albany to Buffalo came the tedious canal boat part of the journey, and this took eleven days. They were crowded and uncomfortable, but since it was June, the weather permitted them to spend a great deal of time on the flat roof of the cabin. Somewhere along that

(6) Van Anrooy, "Zee en Landreis."

(7) Van Anrooy, "Zee en Landreis."

(8) Nollen, *De Afscheiding*, 47, 48.

tow path, another member of that company lies buried. The boat was halted and a short service held over the hastily-dug grave.⁹

At Buffalo a misunderstanding arose between Van de Luijster and Ds. Scholte, and although it is said that the tickets to St. Louis had already been purchased, the plans were changed, and the Zeelanders turned their faces toward Ottawa County, Michigan, where Van Raalte had just established his colony. A steam boat took them from Buffalo, through the lakes, to the mouth of Black Lake, on the Michigan shore. Since the entrance was choked with sand, they were landed with their goods by means of small boats. As they gathered on the sandy beach of Macatawa¹⁰, from which the dunes covered with trees stretch along the shore for miles, Indians came in their canoes and crowded about with friendly curiosity. That night they spent under the open sky.

On Sunday morning, June 27, a flat boat brought our weary, heart-sick travelers to the colony at Holland, where a few totally inadequate shelters had been erected in anticipation of their arrival. Here they had to wait with as much patience as they could muster until the site for their location could be picked out.¹¹

(9) Van Anrooy, "Zee en Landreis."

(10) Black Lake in Ottawa vernacular is "Mekatewagamie," which means Black Water. Macatawa is a reduced form.

(11) Van Anrooy, "Zee en Landreis."

CHAPTER IX

THE CHOICE OF A LOCATION BY VAN RAALTE

There have always been those who have questioned the wisdom of Van Raalte's choice of a location. His critics point to the hardships of the Hollanders in a forested area, to their total unpreparedness by previous environment to the conditions which pioneering in Michigan imposed. A careful and impartial survey of the actual situation in 1846, and of the undisputed present success of the colony would, however, seem to amply justify its founder.

It does not appear that Van Raalte had Michigan in mind when he left The Netherlands in September, 1846. At that time the Northwest still faced South, and eastern Wisconsin, or the prairies of Illinois with the Mississippi as the route to the New Orleans market for surplus products seems to have been more or less definitely his goal.¹

His attention was first directed to Michigan by a Hollander in New York who pointed out the superior transportation facilities of that state.² Reaching Detroit in November, 1846, the early winter decided him to go no further for the present. The members of his little band immediately found work in the shipyards at St. Clair, and Van Raalte himself made the acquaintance and won the friendship and assistance of prominent men like Dr. Duffield, then pastor of the First Presbyterian church, the lawyer Romeyn, Senator Cass, General Robert Stewart and others.³ Detroit was at that time the capital and Van Raalte met the members of the state legislature that winter. All of these men were favorably impressed with his personality, and were anxious to secure the Hollanders, who were considered desirable colonists, for their state.

In his usual vigorous and efficient manner, Van Raalte now set himself to study the situation from every angle, and to acquire all the data necessary to a final decision. His attention was finally directed to Ottawa County to the district lying between the Grand and the Kalamazoo rivers, and toward the end of December he made an exploratory journey to the Black River region.⁴

It is interesting to recall that the Michigan Central had been completed as far as Kalamazoo in February of the pre-

(1) Dosker, Van Raalte, 70.

(2) Letter of Ds. Van Raalte written on board the boat *Great Western* at Buffalo, November 27, 1846, to Ds. Brummelkamp in Arnhem and finished at Detroit. *De Grondwet* (Dec. 1911)

(3) Dosker, Van Raalte, 72, 73.

(4) *Ibid.*

vious years.⁵ From Kalamazoo he proceeded to Allegan, which had been begun by Eastern capitalists in the early thirties. It is located on a site where numerous Indian trails concentrate at an important ford of the Kalamazoo river, and before the panic of 1837 it promised to become a flourishing town.⁶ At Allegan, Judge Kellogg, whose name is so well known and so reverently cherished by the descendants of the Dutch colonists, became his adviser and patron and rendered every conceivable assistance.⁷

On the shores of Black Lake, about three quarters of a mile from the present site of the city of Holland, a small band of Ottawa Indians were living and a Presbyterian missionary, Rev. George N. Smith, was working among them. They lived in bark wigwams, and cultivated the ground a little and traded with the stations on the Grand River. In 1848 the government removed them to the shores of Little Traverse Bay.⁸

Mr. Smith and Indian guides aided Van Raalte to explore the snow covered forest and ascertain the nature of the country in the Black River valley. He was Mr. Smith's guest and received much valuable information and helpful counsel from him as well as hospitality. Late in January, Van Raalte returned to Detroit, fully persuaded as to the destination of his colony, and he immediately made plans to bring his little band of Hollanders to their new home.⁹

We have already stated the fact that Van Raalte's attention had been directed to Michigan by a Hollander in New York, who called his attention to the fact that Michigan was being rapidly developed and was accessible to the markets. Undoubtedly his stay in Detroit and the influence of the friends he made there were factors, but Van Raalte was a man of strong will and with a very keen grasp of a situation, and he realized immediately the importance of the transportation facilities offered by the region he selected. He chose a site on the Great Lakes opposite Chicago, which was then

(5) Detroit Free Press, February 12, 1846.

(6) Fuller, George Newman, *Economic and Social Beginnings of Michigan, A Study of the Settlement of the Lower Peninsula during the Territorial Period, 1805-1837.* (Lansing, 1916, University Series I) 333.

(7) Dosker, Van Raalte, 74, 75.

(8) *History of Michigan and Ottawa Counties.* (H. R. Page & Co., Chicago, 1882) 74.

(9) Dosker, Van Raalte, 75.

becoming a shipping center for grain to the East by way of Great Lakes and the Erie Canal. In Black Lake he saw a splendid harbor. The Michigan Central railroad was being completed to Chicago, and the Pontiac railroad, afterwards the Detroit, Grand Haven and Milwaukee, had been begun. Van Raalte says of the importance of the Michigan Central railroad, "It affords the best opportunity of availing myself of the markets in every direction." Again he writes, "This region is dear to me beyond others, because here I am near the great inland lakes of America; transportation and shipping means much to me."¹⁰

Then, too, he felt it an advantage to be in a region between settled areas. The Kalamazoo, with its mouth about twelve miles to the south, and the Grand about nineteen miles north, were very important navigable rivers with flourishing settlements along their banks. With Allegan, Grand Rapids, Grand Haven and Saugatuck our early settlers were in constant communication for the purchase of much needed supplies. On the other hand Van Raalte considered it an advantage, too, to be out of the path of the flood of European emigrants, mostly German, which was just at that time moving into Wisconsin.¹¹

Another consideration was the fact that for people of limited financial resources, pioneering in a forested area is better and cheaper than on the plains. Abundance of fuel, of material for building homes, churches, and schools was always at hand. Lumbering became an important industry from the very first. The making of staves, laths, etc., afforded winter work and an immediate source of procuring ready cash. Van der Meulen wrote, "From seven pine trees I made more than I paid for the twenty acres of land on which I live. They were made into shingles for roofs."¹²

Ottawa County's soil and topography is formed by sand drifted in from Lake Michigan and by soil deposited by the river. The dunes extend along the lake shore from its north-

(10) De Toestand Der Hollandsche Kolonisatie in den staat Michigan, Noord Amerika in he Begin van het jaar 1849, medegedeeld in drie brieven van de weleerv. A. C. Van Raalte, C. Van der Meulen, en S. Bolks, ann C. G. De Moen (Amsterdam, 1849), 8.

(11) Ibid.

(12) Translation from letter of Ds. Van der Meulen published in De Grondwet, (January, 1912)

ern to its southern limits. The effect of Lake Michigan and the prevailing westerly winds is to modify the temperature. Grand Haven and Milwaukee have approximately the same latitude, but it was found that the temperature in extreme cold weather was 14 degrees higher at Grand Haven than at Milwaukee. Grand Haven has been found to gain thirteen days over Milwaukee in Spring and five in autumn. This favorable climatic condition is responsible for the fruit belt for which western Michigan is famous.

Now as to the charge that the region was unhealthful and responsible for the sickness and deaths of the first year or two, it is far more just to charge the conditions of that first year to malnutrition, the lack of proper sanitary precautions and the natural exhaustion of vitality due to the hardships of the long and difficult journey, than to any unhealthful climatic conditions. Undoubtedly there was a great deal of suffering from malarial diseases. The settlers attributed this to the fact that when the land was plowed it turned up decayed vegetation to the direct rays of the sun and so poisoned the air. The mosquito had not then been discovered as the germ carrier of malaria, and was never connected with the disease which caused them so much annoyance.

Just a few words regarding the history of Ottawa County previous to 1847. Treaties with the Indians in 1821 and 1836, respectively, extinguished the Indian titles to the lands north and south of the Grand River. Between 1831 and 1838 various surveys of the government placed the land on the market, and the opening of a land office at Ionia in 1836 marks an important period in the history of Western Michigan.¹⁵ Ottawa County was organized in 1837 and the 1840 census gives the whole county a population of 208.¹⁶

Grand Haven was the oldest and most important settlement. Rix Robinson, a fur trader, chose this very favorable site in 1821 or 1825 as a headquarters for the operation of the American Fur Company in Western Michigan. At the mouth of the Grand River which was navigable for 240 of its 270 miles, and with the best natural harbor on the west-

(14) Fuller, *Social and Economic Beginnings of Michigan*, 4.

(15) *Ibid.*, 63.

(16) *Statistics of Michigan compiled from the Census of 1850.* (Lansing, 1851)

ern side of the State, Grand Haven was very advantageously situated. The development of the town is usually credited to Rev. William Ferry, who had been a Presbyterian missionary among the Indians at Mackinaw. He came to Grand Haven in 1834 in the interests of Robert Stuart in the employ of the American Fur Company.¹⁷

The next settlements after Grand Haven were made at Robinson in 1836, and a little farther up the river at Eastmanville. Another very interesting but futile attempt was Port Sheldon at the mouth of the Pigeon River about twelve miles south of Grand Haven. A group of Eastern capitalists laid out one of the typical paper cities of that period of speculation. The outlet of the river was frequently entirely barred by sand. When the crash came in 1837 the whole project was abandoned.¹⁸

In the Black River valley outside of the Indians previously mentioned, there were only five white settlers when the Hollanders came in 1847.¹⁹ Thus the development of southern Ottawa County has been wholly their work, and the flourishing towns and beautiful, prosperous farms of to-day are proof of how well they accomplished their task.

(17) Fuller, *Beginnings of Michigan*, 437.

(18) *Ibid.*, 438, 439.

(19) Van Schelven, *De Dan Onzer Volksplanting*, (De Grondwet, April, 1911)

CHAPTER X

THE SETTLEMENT OF ZEELAND

The Zeeland congregation had set out in three companies, and it had been decided that the leader who arrived first should choose the location. The responsibility, thus, rested upon Jannes Van de Luijster, who, as we have seen, had already decided in favor of the Van Raalte settlement in western Michigan. He and his party arrived June 27, 1847.¹

A few weeks later Jan Steketee and his company followed. Kaboord, with whom Dominie Van der Meulen and his family had traveled, had met with a most unfavorable voyage and various delays, and reached Holland August 1, 1847.²

Temporary shelters had been erected, and most of the women and children remained in Holland, while a site was being selected, a road cleared through the forest, and the work of erecting homes was begun. That was a difficult summer. Small-pox had been brought by the company of Jannes Van de Luijster, and an epidemic broke out. The food supplies were meager and unsatisfactory, and malnutrition, crowded and unsanitary conditions did their deadly work.

There were no doctors nor nurses and Dr. Van Raalte served as a physician as well as a spiritual comforter by the bedsides of the sick. It is small wonder that the hearts of our pioneers quailed as they saw themselves in a strange land, surrounded by trackless forests, inhabited by wild beasts and Indians. Nor is it strange that many of them were almost ill with longing and home sickness for the well ordered fields and cozy villages of their native land. Thus it was a discontented and discouraged group of Zeelanders who greeted their pastor, Ds. Van der Meulen. With characteristic vigor, he plunged into the task of renewing their faith and courage.

Immediately upon his arrival, Van de Luijster had picked out a site for his village, six miles east of the Holland settlement. A little block house on Black River, about a quarter of a mile east of Scholte's bridge, was to serve as headquarters. To it, provisions and household goods were brought from Holland by flat-boat, and then taken to the newly-formed village over the so-called road, which had been cut through the forest. A large rock marks the site of this his-

(1) Note 1, Chap. VIII.

(2) Van der Meulen, Jacob (Rev.), *Doel en Leiders der Eerste Landverhuizers. De Grondwet*, August 8, 1911.

toric spot. A bronze tablet now conveys its message to the stranger passing by.

The United States land office for the Grand River district was then located at Ionia, or "Ayoni," as Van de Luijster spelled it in his journal. He bought and staked out claims for Sections 17, 19, and 400 acres in Section 9, Township 5. The patents for this land were granted in 1849. According to the Act of Congress of 1820, this land was bought for \$1.25 an acre.³

A few brave spirits struck right out into the wilderness, and the first families to settle in the neighborhood of Zeeland were Jan Steketee, Jacob De Hond, and Christian Den Herder. The building of Van de Luijster's own house was begun July 21, 1847. These log houses were built in the course of a few weeks from the nearest trees. As a rule, they contained but one room and, often, only one window. The wooden chest, which had contained the family belongings on the journey from The Netherlands, served as a table. At first they cooked on fires of sticks in picnic fashion, but soon made use of fire places or little stoves brought from Grand Rapids.

The township of Zeeland was circled from the northeast to southwest by a marsh surrounded on both sides by hills and by a belt of pine trees. This swamp was almost impenetrable and was inhabited by rattle snakes and wild animals. Just south of the village lay another marsh called the cedar swamp, and for many years this land was considered worthless.⁴ The trees were mostly maple, hemlock, and cedar. Wild cats, bears, and deer were quite common in the forests and squirrels and raccoons ate their corn in the early years.

We remember that the Zeelanders came as a congregation and as a congregation they worshiped for the first time on the third Sunday in August of 1847. The partially completed log house of Jan Steketee served as a church. Until the log church was erected, they held services every Sunday in the house of Jan Wabeke, who lived at the east end of the village and whose house was the largest in the community.

Van de Luijster had set aside eighty acres in Section 19 for the village to be called Zeeland. He records the reason for the name in his Journal: "Because it was founded by the Zeelanders, who called upon the name of the Lord to prosper His work, and that His name might be called upon there forever." The surveying was done by Grootenhuis and Cornelis Verhorst, and inaccuracies occurred because the early work was done with ropes instead of chains, and the

(3) Three original patents.

(4) Den Herder, Jacob, *De Grondwet*, April 19, 1913.

ropes shrank in damp weather. Each lot was to be an acre. Four half acres were set aside in the centre of the village for the church, school and market place. The ground on which the Reformed church and the monument now stand were formally deeded by Van de Luijster to the village, but the two half acres now called the city park have never been so deeded. The total cost of those eighty acres including the original cost at \$1.25 per acre, and the expense of surveying, taxes, etc., was \$144.06.⁵ The plat of the village was recorded at Grand Haven on April 17, 1849.⁶

The village was laid out as a rectangle. There were three streets running east and west. What is now called Main street was then called North street, and had twenty lots facing north. Central avenue was called Cross street and was the principal thoroughfare, with an intersecting street called Church street, running north and south through the public square, which has already been described. South street also had twenty lots. The price of a lot was \$6.48, and each purchaser was obliged to put up a house upon it within three months.⁷

In 1849, under the leadership of Ds. H. G. Klyn, and elders J. Kotvis, Jan De Pree and P. Lankester, a large number of families came from the province of Zeeland. Some of these people went to Wisconsin, and Ds. Klyn and his followers settled at Graafschap. Many, however, came to Zeeland.⁸

Those early years were marked by many changes. Those, who thought they could not make a living in the rude little village, moved to Kalamazoo or Grand Rapids. In 1851, Jan Steketee and his sons left Zeeland to find larger opportunities in Grand Rapids. Kaboord, too, settled at first on what is the poorest land in Zeeland just northeast of the village, but soon moved away. A steady growth was however assured by immigration, and although people from other provinces moved in, the prevailing dialect spoken was "Zeewsch." The influence of the Zeeland element was predominating, and laid its stamp of individuality upon the community.

(5) Journal of Jannes Van de Luijster.

(6) Plat Book, Register's office, p. 14. Grand Haven, Mich.

(7) Journal of Van de Luijster.

(8) De Bey, Zwemer. Stemmen, p. 58. Personal recollections of pioneers form in general the basis of this chapter.

CHAPTER XI

EARLY SOCIAL, INDUSTRIAL AND EDUCATIONAL LIFE IN ZEELAND

The group of Hollanders in southern Ottawa County was known as "the colony." There were a number of churches, each the center of a little community life of its own. Most of those communities were entirely agricultural, but Holland and Zeeland, the largest and most important villages, developed or attempted other industries as well.

In a certain sense, the experiences of the Hollanders were not different from those of other Michigan pioneers, but their isolation, the purposes of their immigration, language, and customs determined their development as a unique and distinct people for years to come. The Hollanders, perhaps, were not as resourceful or ingenious as their Yankee neighbors, but they possessed patience, perseverance, industry, and sterling common sense, qualities no less well calculated to win a victory over the obstacles of pioneer life. The ancient motto of the province of Zeeland "*Luctor et Emergo*" was expressive of the spirit of those days.

Felling trees was a difficult and unaccustomed task for our colonists, and they received some instructions from the kindly Americans before they could do the work satisfactorily. In many cases, those good hard wood logs were rolled together in great piles and simply burned. The first winter fortunately was not severe, and the summer of 1848 was very good for potatoes. But the next summer was dry, and on the whole discouraging. During these first years they suffered from an insufficient, and especially, from an unaccustomed diet. Butter and milk products were scarce, and the inevitable corn meal was distasteful to them as Europeans. Vegetables and fruits were scarce, and the only meat was pork from a very inferior variety of hogs. Occasionally venison brought a welcome change.

The statistics of Michigan for 1850 give some idea of the crops produced in Holland township of which Zeeland was at that time a part.

Wheat, 65 bushels; rye, 20 bushels; corn, 9,750 bushels; oats, 350 bushels; potatoes, 1,530 bushels; butter, 1,930 pounds; maple sugar, 1,610 pounds. In 1850 there were no horses in the colony, as they were useless in working new land. Holland township had only 168 cows and 70 oxen at that time.

Ds. Van der Meulen and Jan Wabeke owned the first spans of oxen in Zeeland. A span of oxen cost about fifty or sixty dollars and were soon worn out by the hard work. The

first horses were bought in 1855, when clearings were more frequent, and their use was more practicable.

In August of 1847, Mr. C. De Putter was one of a committee to go to Grand Rapids to buy provisions for the Zeeland community. They made the journey on foot through the woods and after losing their way once or twice, reached the flourishing little city on the Grand River. They bought white and rye flour, coffee and butter, and even expended some of their precious money for tobacco. A pipe was no doubt a very great luxury in the olden days. They paid their bill in gold, a very rare article in Michigan, which had not yet fully recovered from the severe financial panic of 1837. They loaded their provisions on a flat boat, and poled them to Grand Haven. There they had to wait eight days because of a storm on Lake Michigan. They towed the boat along the coast with a horse, and finally, after another delay, reached Black River. They had spent three weeks on the journey.

Later the trip was made in four days, after a rude road had been built. It was on the road to Grand Rapids, that the colonists became acquainted with the Jenison brothers, who had a saw mill on the Grand River. Grandville, too, was quite a flourishing village, and considered itself as quite a serious rival of Grand Rapids. Trips, on foot, were also made to Allegan or Grand Haven, and the courageous settler carried his supplies home on his back.

It is difficult to realize that all the farm work in those days and for years afterward was done with the crudest implements, and all by hand labor. In order to get the wheat out, the wheat straw was pounded against a board. The only reaper was a scythe.

Huibert Keppe^l, who came to Zeeland in 1843, was active in the business life of the community from the first days. He made barrel staves and shipped them to Chicago. The Black River was navigable at that time, and Groningen was quite a center of business activities. The Veneklasens began a brickyard there. John Rabbes was also a leading character and started a flour mill, but this enterprise came to grief. As the woods were cut down, the river shrank, and its possibilities for water power and navigation diminished.

The principal man in the village of Zeeland was its founder, Jannes Van de Luijster, who lived on the hill overlooking the cedar swamp. He chose this location because of its high and healthful situation, and because of the presence of a spring, which, at that time, furnished water to the whole community. He was the only man of means in the village, and as he was gifted with qualities of leadership,

he took an important part, not only among the Zeelanders, but also in the general interests of the whole colony.

The spiritual leader of the community was Ds. Van der Meulen, the beloved pastor, who shared the hardships and toil, the sorrows and deprivations of his parishioners. He lived at the end of Church street, and the little brook of which we have spoken, ran through his land.

There were two blacksmith shops in Zeeland, a cooper shop and several small stores. The first post office was run in connection with one of these, which was located on the Frank Boonstra residence lot. Letters came by way of the stage from Grand Rapids, or were carried from Allegan. Whiskey seems to have been sold by the grocery stores without a license. A number of the early pioneers were rather addicted to habits of conviviality, and lost the respect of the community.

The social life was bound up wholly with the religious life. The church was the hub around which everything centered. On Sunday, people made their way to the log church from every part of the woods. The Dutch are rare sermon tasters and Ds. Van der Meulen knew his people well and spoke to their hearts. They went home from these services, encouraged and refreshed, ready to take up once more the hard struggles of pioneer life.

The young people had little recreation. Their busy lives did not afford much leisure for amusements, even if the Puritanical views of their elders had not sternly frowned upon even innocent pleasures. The catechism class on Sunday evenings afforded an opportunity to the older boys and girls of meeting. Barn raisings were occasions for some festivity.

Until church quarrels brought bitterness and dissension, a very harmonious and beautiful spirit prevailed among the early settlers. They were all poor, and all willingly helped to bear each other's burdens. Those who had a little means shared with those less fortunate.

Medical facilities were of the simplest. Mrs. G. Baert practised midwifery and also performed the operation of cupping. Her son afterwards became a well-beloved physician in the community. Dr. W. Van Den Berg was also a well known figure in the community, and was considered an oracle for miles around. This was probably due more to his knowledge of human nature, than to his preparation in his subject.

Zeeland was not formally recognized as a school district till December 26, 1850. The first school meeting was held in the Reformed church building January 7, 1851. At that

meeting, one dollar was voted for the education of each child between the ages of four and eighteen. Long before that time, however, school was taught in the log church. Later a school building was erected on the half acre on which the monument to the old settlers now stands.

The first teacher in Zeeland was a young man, Elias Young, who came from Grand Haven and who was not familiar with the Dutch language. He was soon succeeded by "Meester" Robbertus M. De Bruyn, who arrived in the colony in 1848. His first teaching was in Dutch. A little later a young man called Kenworthy, taught English, while Mr. De Bruyn taught in Dutch and learned English from his assistant. Meester De Bruyn was the highly honored and respected man of learning in the community for about fourteen years. He was a man of splendid character and was highly talented. His wife was Susanna Leenhouts, whom he brought from Wisconsin.

NOTE. Personal reminiscences of the late Mr. Govert Keppel, Mrs. Jan Huizinga, Mr. C. Van Loo and others form the basis for this chapter.

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